

VZCZCXRO9345
RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHPG #1333/01 2980813
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 250813Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8139
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 001333

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC: CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS' SLIDE TOWARDS
IRRELEVANCY COULD HAVE LASTING IMPACT ON POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Classified By: Acting Political-Economic Counselor Karen Reider
for reasons 1.4 b+d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Separate sources within the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) speak of a party in crisis with no resolution in sight. Results from the October 20-21 local and Senate elections, in addition to an October 23 opinion poll, show the party continues to lose support and could before long fall below the 5% threshold needed for entry into parliament and national viability. The fear of being banished to the political wilderness could lead some KDU-CSL parliamentarians to consider breaking ranks and supporting a minority Social Democrat (CSSD) government, even if that government at times relied on the Communists. The party will hold an emergency congress December 7 to pick new leadership to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of former party Chair Miroslav Kalousek, but as of late October, it is not even clear who might run for the top spot. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) have been losing support for years. The average age of party members is in the low 60s. The party has very little support in the western half of the country, including in the capital Prague. And its most recent leader, Miroslav Kalousek, is such a controversial figure that other parties are apprehensive about dealing with him, and party members themselves have demanded his resignation over his somewhat desperate and not entirely open negotiations with CSSD Chair Jiri Paroubek about a minority CSSD government that would rely on Communist support. KDU-CSL is defending seven Senate seats in the voting that is taking place in two rounds, October 20-21 and October 27-28. The party made it to the second round runoffs in six districts, all in the eastern half of the country, and has a reasonable chance in two to four of the districts. One of those races features Vsetin mayor Jiri Cunek (KDU-CSL), who leads his ODS opponent by 20 percentage points. A strong win by Cunek would make him a serious candidate for the role of party leader.

¶3. (U) KDU-CSL also did poorly in the local elections, coming in fifth nationwide with 5.76%. Before the elections, the party only had one Mayor at any of the nation's largest 24, or statutory cities. That was Miroslav Tetter and he chose to run for the Senate. (Tetter trails his ODS competitor by more than 20 percentage points and is almost certain to lose in the second round). In Prague, where KDU-CSL had one member of the city council, the party came in sixth, with less than one percent of the votes and will have no representation in the capital's main municipal assembly.

¶4. (C) The party will hold an extraordinary congress to choose new leadership on December 7. Poloff spoke October 18 with Petr Rybar, General Secretary of the Christian Democrats and October 6 with Jaroslav Orel, former KDU-CSL

parliamentarian, advisor to former Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda (KDU-CSL) and member of the party's organization in Prague, about the congress. Rybar conceded that even he has no idea who might run for Chairmanship of the party. He doesn't think former Chair Kalousek will run. He doesn't think Former Deputy Chair Jan Kasal will run. He doesn't think former Chair and Former Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda will run. Stanislav Juranek - Hejtman (Governor) in Southern Moravia has also been mentioned as a possible candidate for party chair, but Rybar thinks Juranek would fail because he initially supported Kalousek's recent negotiations with Paroubek. Orel explained that Kalousek's fall from grace was not only caused by his talks with Paroubek, hastily arranged in the face of an imminent deal between the two large parties, the Social Democrats (CSSD) and the Civic Democrats (ODS). According to Orel, an increasing number of party members has been dissatisfied with Kalousek's style and leadership. Orel was also uncertain who might take over the reins of power, saying that many members hope for a repeat of the "1990 miracle" when Josef Lux, until then a largely unknown local politician, was selected to lead the party. Orel also expressed the conviction that all thirteen of KDU-CSL's parliamentarians would have to be replaced in the future.

15. (C) Rybar had hoped to win five of the Senate seats the party was defending and called attention to the financial as well as political consequences of a more serious defeat. Parties receive 900,000 Czech crowns (US\$41,000) for each Senate seat they win. A disastrous showing (2-3 seats) will not only mean the loss of the other seats and the political influence they bring, but also the loss of income that the party will need to rebuild, something Rybar admits to being very concerned about.

PRAGUE 00001333 002 OF 002

16. (C) When asked about the party's views on early elections, Rybar said that the party is publicly saying it has no objections to this way out of the current impasse. Privately he told us early elections would be a "disaster" for the party. He acknowledged that it is possible the party would fall below the 5% threshold for entry into parliament and went on to explain that even under more hopeful scenarios, such as 6%, the party would probably lose half of its 13 seats in parliament, due to the disproportionate distribution of seats under the current D'Hondt system. Rybar pointed to the Greens, who won 6% of the votes in the June election and only received 6 seats, as an illustration of what would happen to KDU-CSL in such a scenario. Rybar said that Juranek (Hejtman of South Moravia), has made statements in favor of early elections only because he wants to run for parliament and doesn't want to wait until the next general election in 2010. Rybar believes that Juranek is afraid he will not be re-elected to a third term as governor and is therefore looking for another position. Rybar argues that the party needs at least a couple of years to rebuild and consolidate. For Rybar, any government would be better than early elections. Orel agrees that the KDU-CSL parliamentarians are not in favor of early elections, in spite of public comments to the contrary.

17. (C) When asked for the party's stand on the question of possibly locating missile defense facilities in the Czech Republic, Rybar answered that the party is in too much disarray to have a united position on anything. He said nobody wants to provide guidance on any controversial issues. Rybar said that in general, KDU-CSL is inclined to allow a referendum on the question, but predicted that the Communist-led bill demanding a referendum, on parliament's agenda for the session beginning October 24, would be opposed by many KDU-CSL parliamentarians simply because it was submitted by KSCM. Vlasta Parkanova, head of the KDU-CSL parliamentary club, echoed those sentiments when she said October 24 that she opposed the specific bill put forward by the Communists and not necessarily the idea of a referendum

in general. Rybar added, however, that if the bill gathers broader support from members of other parties, he guesses some KDU-CSL members would go along. The proposal was signed by two prominent CSSD parliamentarians, Hana Sedivy and Zdenek Jicinsky. It remains to be seen whether others will add their support.

8 (C) COMMENT. The Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) have been a small but significant part of Czech politics for decades. In the post-communist era, the party played the role of a centrist kingmaker, shifting left or right with the prevailing political winds, and helping to moderate the positions of whichever party they allied themselves to. In the last two years, the party has joined the Civic Democrats (ODS) on the right side of the political spectrum, acting as a counterweight to the traditional leftist parties, the Communists (KSCM) and the Social Democrats (CSSD). In the parliamentary elections of 1998, the party received 9% of the votes. In the 2004 elections to the EU, support was 9.6%. But by June of 2006 the party's support had slipped to 7%. An October 23 opinion poll showed that only 4.5% of Czech voters support the Christian Democrats. If the party continues to lose support and slide towards the political irrelevancy that comes with being below the 5% threshold for participation in parliament, it will leave the political spectrum less stable and more heavily weighted towards the extremes. In the short run, it could also leave the two parties on the left, the Social Democrats and the Communists, with a slight numerical advantage, though it must be added that the Communists are on a trajectory similar to that of the Christian Democrats - sliding support, aging demographics, and an absence of new inspiring leaders or fresh ideas. Of more immediate concern, the lack of party discipline, combined with the fear that the party might become an extraparlimentary party if early elections were to be held, or if ODS and CSSD united and changed the election rules, could lead a few of the party's current thirteen parliamentarians to consider a deal involving support for an informal arrangement between the Social Democrats and the Communists, something that in more secure times has always been unacceptable. END COMMENT.

GRABER